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[Book review]

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Review

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Analytic Philosophy: An Interpretive History is a collection of seventeen essays, all of them commissioned specifically for the volume, which addresses the complex relationship between interpretation and the tradition of 20th century analytic philosophy. The guiding idea, as explained in the Introduction, is the notion of a *tradition-shaping interpretation*. This is the view that interpretations of texts, of philosophers and of larger chunks of the tradition have played a crucial role in the origin, development and persistence of analytic philosophy.

Some of the contributions discuss the interplay between interpretation and tradition at the level of individual texts. Thus, Michael Kremer's essay is about Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*, while Kelly Dean Jolley is concerned with J. L. Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia*. Other contributions focus more generally on individual philosophers: Russell (Peter Hylton, Rosalind Carey), Moore (Hylton again, Consuelo Preti), Wittgenstein (Anat Biletzki on the *Tractatus*; Duncan Richter on the later Wittgenstein), Ramsey (Cheryl Misak), Quine (Sean Morris), Strawson (Hans-Johann Glock), Davidson (Lee Braver) and Dummett (Anat Matar). The focus is thus firmly on household names. Christopher Pincock's essay on Ernest Nagel and his naturalism may be a partial exception; Nagel isn't exactly a marginal figure, but he doesn't quite make it into the short list of leading philosophers in the analytic tradition either.

Some essays deal with broader developments. Alan Richardson explains how logical positivism, once it arrived in America, eventually became a chapter in analytic philosophy, while Scott Soames deals with how analytic philosophers have at different times thought about language and how those reflections have gradually developed into "the emerging science of language and information" (p. 42). In a joint essay, James Chase and Jack Reynolds review some of the connections between analytic philosophy and phenomenology, offering an account of the "parting of the ways" that differs in crucial respects from Dummett's well-known picture of the

two traditions originating from the same source like the Danube and the Rhine and only gradually separating and flowing further and further away from each other: according to our authors, there are genuine points of contact between phenomenology and ordinary language philosophy, while the emerging analytic tradition – Russell and Moore – is “marked by a surprisingly meager engagement with the early [realist] phenomenology” (p. 65). Finally, Sandra Lapointe addresses questions regarding the historiography of analytic philosophy. One of her aims is to undermine what she sees as the prevailing view of analytic philosophy as *one* tradition.

As this quick summary indicates, *Analytic Philosophy: An Interpretive History* is a rich and diverse collection. There is genuine thematic unity, though, and this is what makes the book particularly useful. It goes without saying that essays coming from such a distinguished group of scholars are invariably of a very high quality; I admit, though, that I found some of the essays rather more engaging than the others. The volume offers a great deal of valuable information about as well as some genuine insights into the analytic tradition and its historiography.

The volume starts with a substantial Introduction by the editor, Aaron Preston. Preston explains that the book is informed by a *hermeneutic* (hence, “Continental”) conception of analytic philosophy as a tradition that results from an interplay of philosophical interpretations operating “at different levels of granularity” (p. 2). Preston also spends some time explaining his own view of the analytic tradition. This is the controversial thesis, defended in his book *Analytic Philosophy: The History of an Illusion* (Continuum, 2007), that “analytic philosophy” has not only been shaped by interpretations but was in fact “interpreted into existence” (p. 5). Very briefly, his claim is (i) that the traditional conception of analytic philosophy, which is found in a number of texts from the 1930s until the 1970s, saw analytic philosophy as advocating linguistic analysis as the uniquely correct method in philosophy; (ii) that this conception resulted from *misreading* Moore and Russell (and also Frege) as proponents of “linguistic analysis”; (iii) that apart from this misreading, there was no reason to lump these philosophers together; and (iv) that therefore analytic philosophy owes its existence to an “illusion of unity” (p. 4).

I don’t find Preston’s claim convincing. This is not the place to offer any arguments on this matter; I merely note that even Preston speaks of “the advent of the analytic tradition”, which, according to him, antedates the term “analytic philosophy” by about three decades (see p. 11). This isn’t consistent with his own account of the origins of analytic philosophy – unless he is distinguishing sharply between “analytic tradition” and “analytic philosophy”. I have considerable sympathy for the distinction, but my reasons for drawing it probably differ from Preston’s.

Luckily, Preston's controversial story about the origin of analytic philosophy is a minor issue here, because it isn't presupposed in any of the essays that comprise the bulk of the volume. What the essays do take seriously, to repeat, is the general idea of a "tradition-shaping interpretation". The term suggests unidirectional influence – a tradition that is shaped by interpretations– but in fact the relationship is one of mutual influence; many of the cases discussed in the book are ones where some broad interpretive category relating to analytic philosophy – such as "ordinary language philosophy", "early analytic philosophy" or, indeed, "analytic philosophy" – has influenced, and in many cases continue to influence, how an individual text or a philosopher has been understood. Together, the essays make a convincing case that consideration of the interplay of tradition and interpretation is a potential source of important insights. Here I can do no more than mention a few highlights of the volume.

Kelly Dean Jolley has written an exciting essay on J. L. Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia* and how our understanding of "ordinary language philosophy" continues to shape what we read into that work. We believe we know what an ordinary language philosopher thinks and does and our understanding factors into what we take to be going on in Austin's criticism of A. J. Ayer and the sense-data theory of perception: Austin must have been a champion of the ordinary person, a refuter, or maybe even the most important refuter, of the sense-data theory and hence, by implication, a defender of direct realism. I suspect that many readers of Austin's masterpiece have sensed that there is something extraordinary going on in that work, and Jolley does excellent work in explaining what that something consists in. According to Jolley, Austin held that a philosophical theory exists only in a dialectical context, that is, only insofar as it articulates a competing philosophical position; thus, a *direct* realist is one who, among other things, is opposed to something that is *indirect*. In *Sense and Sensibilia*, Austin was opting out of that dialectic, rather than trying to score points against Ayer and sense-data.

Michael Kremer argues in his essay that we can arrive at a correct understanding of Gilbert Ryle's theory of the mind in *The Concept of Mind* only by putting that work in the context of its complex evolution. Kremer does impressive detective work here, showing how A. J. Ayer's 1947-inaugural lecture *Thinking and Meaning* informs us about a phase in Ryle's gradual working out of a theory of the mind; Ayer was deeply influenced by Ryle, and Ryle in turn was helped by the critical reception of Ayer's lecture. Kremer shows how many of the key themes in *The Concept of Mind*, such as the distinction between multi-track and single-track disposition words and the distinction between capacities and tendencies, are direct responses to criticisms originally levelled

at Ayer. We are accustomed to thinking of *The Concept of Mind* as endorsing behaviorism about the mind, but Kremer's contextualization helps us to see that behaviorism was at best a dialectical step towards a "person-centred theory of the mind" (a term Kremer borrows from Elmer Sprague).

Michael Dummett endorsed a number of well-known claims about Frege and his historical achievement, including the following: 1) Frege's logic was apparently born from Frege's brain, largely unfertilized by external influences; 2) similarly for his philosophy, which doesn't owe very much more to external influences than his logic; 3) the single decisive step in the development of analytic philosophy was taken by Frege when he composed §62 of *Grundlagen*, where the "linguistic turn" takes place; 4) Frege was the philosopher who succeeded in delineating the "proper object of philosophy", showing the way towards a systematic theory of meaning. These are striking claims; some have found them bizarre. At the very least, historians have deemed them anachronistic and have argued that Dummett has either neglected or misconstrued the historical context.

In her contribution, Anat Matar undertakes to dispel the impression of eccentricity by sketching the key elements of Dummett's *dialectical* reading of Frege: (i) anti-realism, which is of course well known, coupled with two less widely acknowledged elements: (ii) a "Hegelian" conception of the inevitable temporality of our being and hence of our thought, plus (iii) a Collingwood-like solution to the problem of historical understanding: "[t]hought is at once both context-dependent and sustainable across contexts" (p. 264); a historian, therefore, can "re-enact" (Collingwood's term) a past thought, which once existed in a certain context and now exists in the context of our present concerns, thanks to the historian's act of revival. Not being an expert on Dummett, Hegel or Collingwood, I'm not in a position to assess the objective merits of Matar's reading; but in my view she succeeds in throwing a flood of light on the quite special sense in which Dummett was a historian of analytic philosophy.

Finally, Sandra Lapointe is concerned with the general shape of our – or of analytic historians' – understanding of the analytic tradition. One important question about the tradition is this: How did philosophy come to evolve, diversify, and specialize into the "analytic philosophy" that we know today? One of the points she argues for is that the prevailing conception of analytic philosophy as one unique and distinctive tradition ("the traditionalist conjecture") is ill-suited to explain the evolution of diversity. Given the conjecture, entire regions of analytic philosophy continue to remain vastly underexplored, early theories of mind and cognition being a prominent example, and the focus remains firmly on what is recognized as the agenda delineated by the

“early analytic philosophers”: (1) the foundations of mathematics and of science, (2) problems in and about formal logic and (3) the study of linguistic meaning. Lapointe has identified one perspective from which to argue for inclusiveness and broad scope in the historical investigation of analytic philosophy. There are other such perspectives – for instance one that opens up by looking beyond the usual Anglo-American, and even Anglo-Austrian, axis in the analytic tradition. Whether such perspectives yield important insights into the analytic tradition, or at least questions that are worth asking, is a question for further reflection. That there are such perspectives, though, is in itself an important fact about the multifaceted analytic tradition.